

A close-up photograph of a plant branch with several green, elongated leaves and a cluster of small, round, green seed pods. The background is blurred, showing more of the plant and some white flowers.

Strategic Plan 2025–2035



Connecting Country is a not-for-profit community organisation operating at a landscape scale to restore, enhance and increase biodiversity across the Mount Alexander Shire and surrounds in Central Victoria. We are community led and work with a wide range of community groups, government agencies and other organisations.

Our vision: For the people of the Mount Alexander region to be actively engaged with and proud of the beautiful, productive, healthy and diverse landscapes, habitats, forests, waterways, flora and fauna we help sustain in our region.

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Dja Dja Wurrung Country

The Mount Alexander Region and beyond is the djandak (Country) of the Dja Dja Wurrung people, the Indigenous Traditional Owners of this region. They have lived on these traditional lands and cared for djandak over many thousands of years. For them, djandak is more than just a landscape, it is more than what is visible to the eye – it is a living entity, which holds the stories of creation and histories that cannot be erased. Their Martiinga kuli (ancestors) looked after this Country and they are duty bound to do the same. We acknowledge, respect and work with the Dja Dja Wurrung people as the first peoples of this region.

We also recognise the Taungurung people whose traditional lands meet Dja Dja Wurrung country in the east of the Mount Alexander region.





How we make a difference

Our mission is to connect country by drawing on the wealth of knowledge and experience in our community. We nourish and sustain the region of Mount Alexander by practical on-ground actions and innovative ecological land management that connects people and landscapes to support a sustainable and healthy environment. We contribute to the wellbeing economy. We achieve this through a program of community engagement, landscape restoration, Landcare support, and monitoring and evaluation.

In our approach, we use the following guiding principles:

- Respect, appreciate and engage with the Dja Dja Wurrung people as the **traditional owners** of the Mount Alexander region.
- Promote long-term actions that build resilience into **connected human** and ecological systems and processes.
- **Climate change** adaptation and mitigation require continuous focus.
- Act at a landscape scale and across land tenures to improve ecological connectivity.
- Support **community led** grassroots approaches to action, decision-making and involvement.
- Use the best-available **science** to underpin activities and approaches to monitoring and evaluation.
- Empower our community to become good land stewards by providing information, training and support.
- Be **friendly, respectful and professional** in all our activities.
- **Share our knowledge** and expertise on issues related to landscape restoration in our region and contribute to relevant policy issues.
- **Be accountable** to members, the community, funders and other supporters.
- **Attract investment** for landscape restoration from government, trusts, foundations and other public good investors.





Where we came from

With support from the Norman Wettenhall Foundation and the Friends of the Box Ironbark Forests, Connecting Country was initiated in 2007 by local people determined to have a community-based organisation address issues associated with declines in landscape health. They had a vision to connect people and landscapes to achieve a sustainable and healthy environment. Since then, Connecting Country has progressed towards this vision by supporting landholders and Landcare groups to implement on-ground conservation works, coordinating community education and awareness-raising about landscape restoration, and implementing a rigorous monitoring and evaluation program. In adopting Connecting Country as the concept and name for our organisation, we hoped to acknowledge and encourage stewardship of the land by all its inhabitants.





Why we developed this strategic plan

In its earliest years, Connecting Country developed its Biodiversity Blueprint to document the health of the local landscape and guide initial activities. Connecting Country grew rapidly as an organisation and gained knowledge about the environmental threats and opportunities in the local area. In 2014 Connecting Country reviewed the newly identified environmental issues and its role, resulting in preparation of Connecting Country's 2014–2024 Strategic Plan. This plan aimed to set the direction for the organisation over the next ten years, subject to periodic review by the Committee of Management. It was updated in 2018–19 to reflect emerging issues and changes in funding circumstances and organisational capacity.

This 2024–2035 Strategic Plan results from a review of our operations and the funding landscape in the context of the continuing need for investment in landscape restoration

in the Mount Alexander Region. The review concluded that the rationale for Connecting Country remains strong and that the key focus areas for the organisation are sound and remain relevant. The 2024–2035 Strategic Plan will guide the direction of Connecting Country and be used by the Committee of Management and staff to make decisions, develop projects and seek funding. It is a public document that describes and promotes what Connecting Country does, and how we plan to continue into the future. This plan will be reviewed periodically at the direction of the Committee of Management.





Landscape of the Mount Alexander region

Connecting Country's area of interest is defined as the Mount Alexander region of Central Victoria, which encompasses the Mount Alexander Shire (an area of 152,895 ha) and extends a short distance into the neighbouring shires. It includes the towns of Castlemaine, Newstead, Maldon, Harcourt and Taradale, and many smaller settlements. The region contains a diverse range of environmental values, which have been cared for and used by people for thousands of years.

The Mount Alexander region overlaps with four separate **bioregions** – the Goldfields, Central Victorian Uplands, Victorian Volcanic Plain and Victorian Riverina – each of which has characteristic biological and geological values. The landscape is intersected by several waterways of historical and ecological interest (including the Loddon River in the west, and the Campaspe and Coliban Rivers in the east). There are a few prominent and well vegetated hills

(including Mount Alexander and Mount Tarrengower) and some important agricultural areas.

Compared to many other parts of south-eastern Australia, the Mount Alexander region has relatively high native vegetation cover. Most of this remnant vegetation can be broadly described as 'box-ironbark forest'.

For many flora and fauna species these forests are one of their few remaining strongholds, including many species considered to be threatened with extinction at the state and national level. Some of the notable taxa include the elusive and charismatic Brush-tailed Phascogale; the plant known as Southern Shepherd's Purse (*Ballantinia antipoda*) whose worldwide distribution is confined to the Mount Alexander Regional Park; and, the declining Victorian Temperate Woodland Bird Community which has become a focus for Connecting Country.



The overall **condition** of the box-ironbark forest is generally low-to-moderate due to the legacy of mining, wood collection, excessive grazing by native and introduced animals and weed invasion. Yellow Box Woodlands and other vegetation types in the more fertile parts of the region have been disproportionately removed – and are therefore considered to be threatened ecosystems at the local, state and national scales. The relatively small remnants of these vegetation types tend to be located on private land.

The larger remnant habitats within Connecting Country's area form important **biodiversity hotspots** within a matrix of restoration efforts across Victoria. They act as biological stepping stones, helping to maintain biological connectivity between the Great Dividing Range to the south, the Murray Riverina Plains to the north, and to mosaics of box ironbark forests and open grassy woodlands to the east and west. Despite being relatively extensive, habitats within the Mount Alexander region are still significantly fragmented, and there is much opportunity for their expansion and to create better linkages between them.

Climate change and its impacts is an issue of growing concern and focus for the community. The Victorian Climate Change Projections 2019*

for the Loddon Campaspe Region indicate maximum and minimum daily temperatures will continue to increase over this century (very high confidence). Rainfall will continue to be variable, but over the long term it is expected to continue to decline in winter and spring (medium to high confidence) and autumn (low to medium confidence), but with some chance of little change. Extreme rainfall events are expected to become more intense on average through the century (high confidence), but remain variable in space and time. Connecting Country's activities – such as protection of remnant vegetation, revegetation, establishing wildlife corridors, control of pest plants and animals, and biodiversity monitoring – all contribute to climate change adaptation, mitigation and a better understanding of its effects. However, there is more that can be done locally and at larger scales. By working with people in our community to address the direct and indirect impacts of climate change, we hope to create a robust and healthy local landscape.

European colonisation in the Mount Alexander region commenced in the late 1830s and early 1840s and was greatly accelerated from the early-1850s with the discovery of large gold deposits. Since then, agriculture has been the main activity on private

*Climate Change in Australia: www.climatechangeinaustralia.gov.au/en/projects/victorian-climate-projections-2019/



land in the Mount Alexander region. Connecting Country has found that our local farmers wish to manage their land sustainably. They also value the remnant environmental values within and surrounding their properties for their economic, social, aesthetic and intrinsic values, and for the role they play in assisting farm productivity. In many cases, Connecting Country has been able to support these farmers in their management of these biodiverse areas.

Within the Mount Alexander region many large farm landholdings are rapidly **transitioning** into multiple smaller landholdings. These smaller landholders typically have off-site income and are not dependent upon making a living from the property through agriculture. Many are 'tree-changers' who have purchased the land for the purpose of living in a rural or bush setting and have no intention of stocking it with sheep or other grazing animals. Other landholdings are now farmlets or hobby farms, grazed relatively lightly by low densities of stock such as sheep, horses, goats and alpacas. As a result of this reduced farming intensity, the local ecosystem is changing. Extensive areas of native vegetation are regenerating, and native animals and plants are returning. This land use change provides an opportunity for Connecting Country

and other groups to facilitate lasting biodiversity gains and protection on these properties.

The Mount Alexander region is characterised by an **engaged and active community** with a high proportion of people interested in landscape restoration. At the high end of the 'interest' spectrum, there are many people already involved and passionate – and have a good understanding of the ecological values and threats within the local area. These highly-engaged people are often involved with one or more of the 30 local Landcare and Friends groups. Local participation in Landcare is amongst the highest rate in the country. At the other end of the 'interest' spectrum, there are many people who enjoy and appreciate the local landscape, but who have little experience, involvement or understanding of it. Connecting Country's challenge is to increase the number of people engaged in the local landscape and its restoration, and to encourage those already engaged to become more enthusiastic and involved.



Landcare Groups of the Mount Alexander Region

- 1 Baringhup Landcare
- 2 Barkers Creek Landcare & Wildlife Group
- 3 Baynton Sidonia Landcare
- 4 Campaspe Valley Landcare
- 5 Castlemaine Landcare Group
- 6 Chewton Landcare
- 7 Elphinstone Land Management Association (ELMA)
- 8 Friends of Campbells Creek Landcare
- 9 Friends of Kalimna Park
- 10 Friends of Kaweka Sanctuary
- 11 Friends of Taradale Nature Conservation Reserve
- 12 Friends of Vaughan Springs
- 13 Golden Point Landcare
- 14 Guildford & Upper Loddon Landcare
- 15 Harcourt Valley Landcare
- 16 Langley Landcare
- 17 Maldon Urban Landcare Group (MULGA)
- 18 Malmsbury District Landcare
- 19 McKenzie's Hill Action & Landcare
- 20 Metcalfe Landcare
- 21 Muckleford Catchment Landcare
- 22 Newstead Landcare
- 23 North Harcourt / Sedgwick Landcare
- 24 Nuggetty Land Protection Group
- 25 Post Office Hill Action Group
- 26 Sutton Grange Landcare
- 27 Taradale Landcare
- 28 Tarrangower Cactus Control Group
- 29 Victoria Gully Group



Landcare is about caring for your land and your local area so it continues to support our community and natural resources for generations to come.



Victorian
Landcare
Program





Strategic Plan 2025–2035

Vision: For the people of the Mount Alexander region to be actively engaged with and proud of the beautiful, productive, healthy and diverse landscapes, habitats, forests, waterways, flora and fauna we help sustain in our region.

Mission: We connect country by drawing on the wealth of knowledge and experience in our community. We nourish and sustain the region of Mount Alexander by practical on-ground actions and showcasing innovative possibilities of ecological land management.

Engaging Community

The Mount Alexander region community appreciate and understand the local landscape

Supporting Landcare

The Landcare groups of the Mount Alexander region are healthy, with many active members and clear plans for the future of their local area

Restoring Landscapes

The remnant vegetation across the Mount Alexander region is better protected and managed, connectivity between remnant habitat areas is increased, and native species are flourishing

Monitoring and Evaluation

Landscape restoration outcomes continuously improved through a commitment to long term monitoring and evaluation of our activities

Organisational Foundations

A sustainable, well-managed, adaptable organisation recognised as a leader among community not-for-profit environmental groups

FOCUS AREA GOALS



Engaging community

Goal: The Mount Alexander region community are supported to understand and actively participate in caring for the local landscape.

Objectives	Strategic actions
Landholders connect with their land and the wider landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a high-quality ongoing education program that is engaging, useful to landholders and integrated across all our projects • Encourage and support landholders to implement appropriate management actions on their properties • Engage landholders through property visits, wildlife monitoring, education events, providing information, social media and our website • Clarify our target audience and tailor engagement tools to the interests, needs and capabilities of our target landholders
Social connections are fostered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build on our current high level of community interest by providing engaging events that bring people together • Maintain strong and active communications that foster social connection via personal interactions, events, the website, blog, and local press • Provide opportunities to foster meaningful connections between environmental knowledge holders and the community
Volunteers are encouraged and supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge and thank volunteers appropriately • Maintain a volunteer database
Communication of our aims and achievements builds community capacity and participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop useful land management education materials and make them freely and readily available • Provide high quality, science-based knowledge and information in an interactive and engaging way and support skills development. • Produce an annual report highlighting Connecting Country's achievements and landscape improvements • Develop a communications plan with communications specialist

Objectives	Strategic actions
<p>Our partnerships for landscape restoration enhanced & strengthened</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop, maintain and use our partnerships with government agencies, local government, philanthropic organisations, Landcare, local environmental groups and other relevant organisations (including Castlemaine Field Naturalists, Friends of the Box Ironbark Forest, North Central Catchment Management Authority, Trust for Nature, Wettenhall Environment Trust, Birdlife Australia and Birdlife Castlemaine District) • Develop and promote our projects and engagement events in collaboration with other relevant organisations • Continue to build relationships with Traditional Owners to incorporate their aspirations into our, and our partners', work and offer opportunities for two-way learning.



Supporting Landcare

Goal: The Landcare groups of the Mount Alexander region are in a healthy condition, with many active members and clear plans for the future of their local area.

Objectives	Strategic actions
Enthusiastic Landcare groups are active throughout the Mount Alexander region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support a Landcare Facilitator role to work with the Landcare groups within the Mount Alexander region • Maintain regular communication with Landcare groups about current funding opportunities, relevant events, group support, environmental best practice, and government information and policy • Assist Landcare groups to develop strategic documents, funding applications, action plans and local engagement activities • Host bi-annual Landcare link-up events to share ideas and maintain connection across the region • Maintain a Landcare Steering Group to help guide the role and to provide a local forum on Landcare issues • Identify opportunities for network-scale Landcare projects
Landcare groups have beneficial partnerships and on-going resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link local groups with each other and with Connecting Country and its projects • Seek information from the groups about their needs and aspirations • Identify opportunities for partnerships between Landcare Groups and other stakeholders • Support groups with sourcing funding for their local projects
A broader spectrum of the community is involved in land management groups and their activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement proven and innovative ideas to engage more of the local community in Landcare • Promote Landcare groups and their activities in local media and on our website • Create opportunities for urban residents to get involved in local Landcare projects



Objectives	Strategic actions
Landcare groups have access to current best practice and knowledge about all relevant aspects of landscape restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the responsibility of landholders for managing their land and link landholders with local Landcare groups for support • Run and promote education events that are accessible and appropriate for local Landcare groups and provide the latest thinking in landscape management • Support development of collaborative action plans in conjunction with relevant agencies

Landcare encompasses the formal Landcare groups in the Mount Alexander region, and other related land management groups and Friends groups.



Restoring landscapes

Goal: Remnant vegetation across the Mount Alexander region is better protected and managed, connectivity between remnant habitat areas is increased, and native species are flourishing.

Objectives	Strategic actions
<p>Areas of native vegetation in the region are increasing in size, better connected and more structurally and floristically diverse, providing habitat for native animals, particularly threatened species.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and support on ground habitat restoration works including protecting remnant vegetation, encouraging natural regeneration, revegetation, pest plant and animal control, and reducing grazing pressure • Continue using threatened species as targets for revegetation actions, particularly woodland birds from the Temperate Woodland Bird Community, Brush-tailed phascogales and the Eltham Copper Butterfly. • Develop projects and seek funding for actions identified in Woodland bird summary report 2018 • Source funding to implement large-scale, long-term woodland projects across priority zones • Identify and encourage landholders and groups in woodland bird priority zones to become involved in projects
<p>Connecting Country supports and develops projects that lead to landscape restoration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use science-based rationale and community knowledge in developing new projects to address threatening processes and protect, increase and enhance native vegetation across the Mount Alexander region • Develop viable projects ready for funding opportunities and to present to potential funders • Develop and maintain partnership opportunities with relevant organisations • Support and seek opportunities to improve biodiversity across the Mount Alexander region, outside of existing projects • Develop and maintain a prospectus of potential projects in partnership with local community groups



Objectives	Strategic actions
<p>Landscape restoration projects accommodate climate change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to monitor Connecting Country's Climate Future Plots (planted 2022) to understand climate influences and genetic resilience. • Seek further opportunities to establish climate change adaptation projects • Adapt land restoration methods to climate change in line with science-based recommendations and best practice • Educate community on climate change implications for our landscape
<p>Landholders across the region are enthused, supported, and have opportunities to be involved in Connecting Country</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain capability of staff so that they can provide useful and appropriate restoration advice to landholders and groups • Continue to tap into new landholders interested in land restoration • Keep website up to date and providing useful information for landholders implementing their own projects • Link landholders with other opportunities for support such as Landcare, Land for Wildlife and Trust for Nature • Continue involvement with Tree Project and other projects that provide plants to landholders
<p>Sustainable agricultural systems that enhance the natural environment are supported</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage and inform the farming community in environmentally sustainable farming practices and land restoration • Develop project plans and feasibility assessments for potential projects in agricultural areas (e.g., target the basalt/volcanic plains and their associated grassland and grassy woodland communities). • Source funding to implement projects and develop trial project sites



Monitoring and evaluation

Goal: Landscape restoration outcomes continuously improve through a commitment to long-term monitoring and evaluation of our activities.

Objectives	Strategic actions
<p>Long-term monitoring: We gauge the environmental health of the Mount Alexander region landscape on an ongoing basis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue long-term monitoring of birds and arboreal mammals as measures of recording biodiversity change at a landscape scale • Prepare regular reports documenting monitoring results • Maintain our comprehensive monitoring database and provide data to relevant public databases including the Birdlife Bird Atlas and Victorian Biodiversity Atlas • Sustain our long-term monitoring programs by empowering our community to conduct robust biodiversity monitoring, and ensure the data we collect is being shared and used appropriately • Continue to record baseline vegetation conditions at all landscape restoration project sites • Implement new monitoring programs on a case-by-case basis • Promote the use of smart phone apps and other technology to assist with data collection, storage and interpretation
<p>Evaluation: The effectiveness and impact of Connecting Country's activities are evaluated</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure up-to-date and effective internal and external evaluation processes are used for each focus area, using the Expert Advisory group and universities (e.g., research projects, internships) where appropriate • Develop an evaluation plan for Connecting Country's activities based on principle of monitor, evaluate, review and improve. • Monitor Connecting Country partnerships using stakeholder analysis tools

Objectives	Strategic actions
<p>Community-based monitoring: Community members are involved in project planning and monitoring programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities and encourage community involvement in Connecting Country's monitoring programs • Run training events and develop materials to assist community members and groups to enhance their monitoring skills • Provide information on the use of current apps and how to access the Bird Atlas, Australian Living Atlas and other new technologies for documenting biodiversity information • Maintain an inventory of monitoring equipment for loan to members and groups (e.g., wildlife cameras, binoculars, field guides) • Support people and groups to implement their own monitoring programs, particularly within woodland bird priority zones • Provide monitoring results to the landholders upon whose properties the survey sites are located
<p>Review and improve: Monitoring and evaluation lead to ongoing improvement</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the information gained to identify best practice and to indicate directions for future improvement • Identify and respond to emerging threats, opportunities and gaps for future monitoring and evaluation • Adapt to feedback from project partners and the community

Organisational foundations

Goal: Connecting Country is a sustainable, well-managed, and adaptable organisation that is recognised as a leader in the management of community not-for-profit environmental organisations.

Connecting Country is a not-for-profit incorporated organisation under the Victorian Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012. To We are a registered charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) with Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) Status. For our projects, we are accountable to our funders. As an organisation, we are accountable to our members, and we operate in accordance with our Constitution.

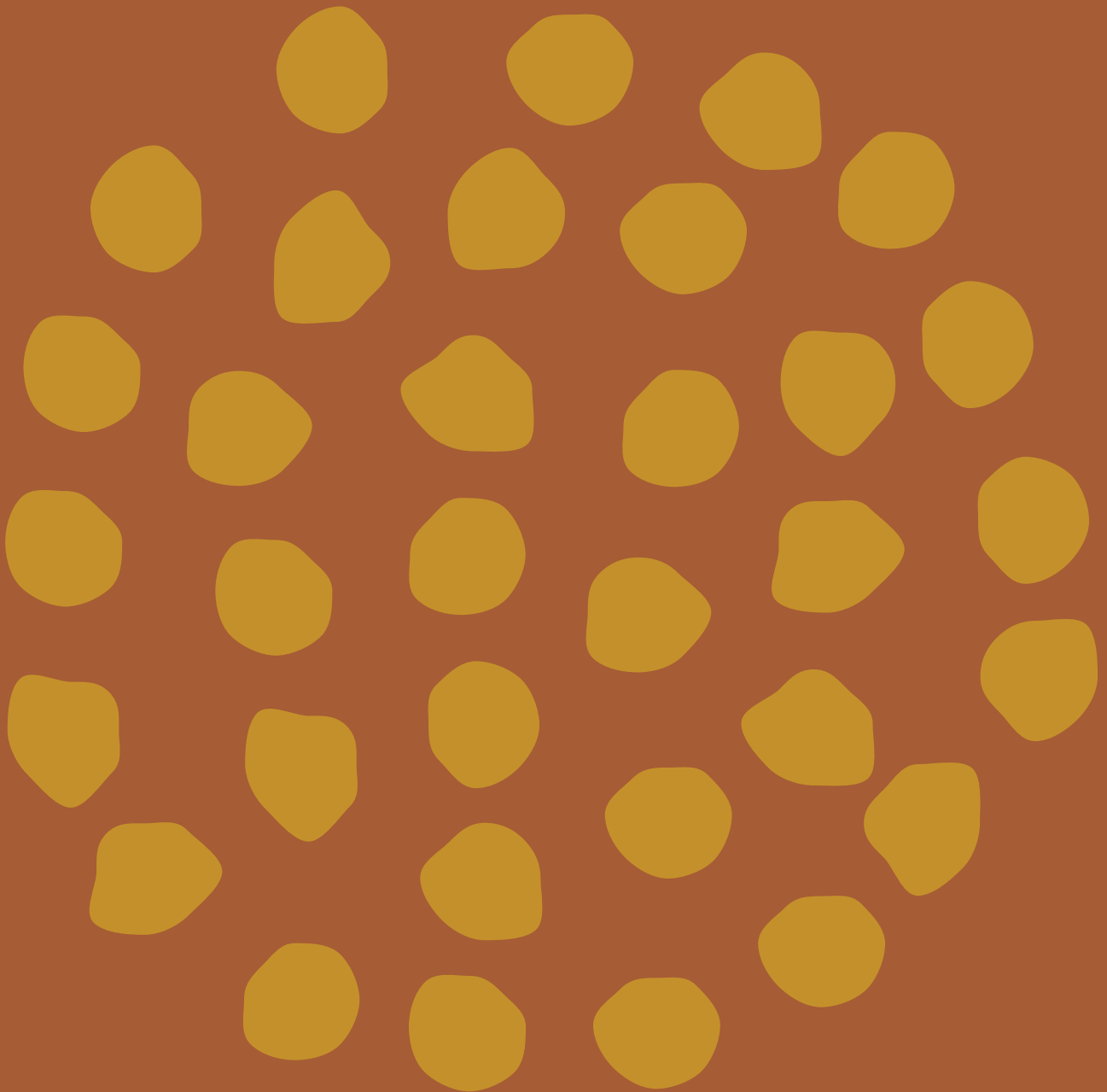
Objectives	Strategic actions	Relevant CC Documents
Governance: We have effective and efficient governance supported by sufficient capacity and expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Periodically review Connecting Country's structure and effectiveness Maintain a balanced committee with appropriate skills, experience and diversity Adhere to our constitution and internal policies Invite community input to Connecting Country's goals and plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Constitution 2013 Delegations Policy Human Resources Policy Creative Commons Copyright Standing Orders Risk Management Plan
Planning: We maintain a relevant long-term plan that is used and periodically reviewed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate strategic plan objectives into annual work and project planning Review the strategic plan and its implementation regularly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic Plan 2025–2035 Woodland Birds Action plan
Partnerships: We are outward-focussed and partner to increase capacity and impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop relationships with key partners (government, community organisations, individuals & other groups) Seek new opportunities to collaborate with existing and new partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential Project Policy Human Resources Policy Memorandums of Understanding



Objectives	Strategic actions	Relevant CC Documents
<p>People: We attract and retain high quality contributors– paid and unpaid</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote a creative and cohesive organisational culture with teamwork, cooperation and fun • Seek opportunities to increase core staff numbers and capacity • Implement contemporary human resources policy and practice within the legal framework • Support skills and knowledge development for staff, committee and volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human Resources Policy • Delegations Policy
<p>Financial: We have diverse and sustainable funding with sound financial management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider alternative funding sources (such as crowdsourcing, membership, sponsorship) • Actively research and respond to new funding opportunities and maintain 'ready-to-go' projects • Develop strategic partnerships with existing and potential funders • Maintain transparent financial systems, demonstrate accountability, and act legally and ethically at all times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Policy • Potential Project Policy • Credit Card Policy • Fund Management Policy • Delegation Manual • Annual financial audit







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